176 whilst, formerly, ideas were frequently lost or distorted by popular
178 tradition ; progression will henceforth be not merely *arithmetical* but *geometrical*. The *book* will be the accumulator in which the intellectual forces of the race will be stored for future transmission, without wastage, prolific of light and stimulus to every sphere of human activity. The Blacks of South Africa have never invented any system [2/2] of writing. The idea of representing an object, a number, a thought, or a sound by any conventional sign, seems never to have occurred to them. Makhani, Muzila's old counsellor, did not know his own age. He probably thought, in common with many of his contemporaries, that he was at least ten years old. One day I said to him : "Why didn't you go each year, when the leaves begin to appear on the trees, and make some kind of a mark on the bark of a nkuhlu? Then, to-day, you could have counted all the marks and you would know how old you are!" He laughed and considered the idea futile, absurd! The absence of any system of writing is, doubtless, the proof of a certain intellectual inferiority, but environment may easily account for the illiterate condition of the Natives. In fact it is environment which is the chief cause of their centuries-long stagnation.

It would, however, be doing a wrong to these people, were we to judge them solely by the absence of industrial progress. Mental activity is not manifested only in the manufacture of machinery or in the transactions of high finance. Man is a being endowed with thought and speech. Speech and literature, which reflect thought, are phases of human activity more essential than industrial undertakings. The Thongas, in common with their neighbours the Ba-Sutho and the Zulus, do most certainly possess a literature, although they have no system of writing and may be classed as illiterates ; of this fact I shall furnish abundant proof when treating of their *literary and artistic life*.